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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

VOLUME XXXVII

JUNE, 1911

NUMBER 6

Editorial

THE UNIFICATION OF NATIONS, AND THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE WORLD

The nations of the world are constantly and rapidly coming closer together. France has recently adopted the system of time belts, already in use in the rest of Europe except Russia, in the United States and Canada, and in considerable parts of Africa and Asia. The day is probably not far distant when, in practically all the civilized world, differences in time will be reckoned in even hours. The very watches that we carry in our pockets bear witness to the growing unity of the world. Of far greater significance are the practical steps recently taken for the prevention of war. The statesmen of Great Britain have given cordial response to the suggestions of the President of the United States respecting an arbitration treaty which, by bringing all differences between the two countries within its terms, would tend to make war between these two countries impossible. The people of the British Isles have promptly indorsed the utterances of their statesmen, and in the other countries of Europe there have been expressions of a desire to take similar steps in the direction of universal peace. These signs of promise may not at once come to full fruition. Treaties proposed may not at once become treaties in force. But delay, if it occurs, will be only temporary. The movement for the creation of permanently friendly relations between nations through the substitution of courts of arbitration for conflict of armies has behind it forces too powerful long to be resisted. The dreams of universal empire achieved by force of arms cherished by the Alexanders and the Napoleons will never be realized. Instead will come a federation of nations of ever-increasing scope.

This movement is of far more than merely political significance. It is related both as effect and as cause to the interchange of thought, and the contact of individuals of different nations in every sphere of human activity. Commerce has for centuries been international. Science knows no boundaries of physical or political geography. Chemistry is neither American nor European. Education is, in a sense, a national or local matter, but in other aspects of it is thoroughly international. Every nation is interested in the financial condition and the monetary system of every other. It is not only politically, but in all the aspects of human life that the nations are drawing near together.

This increasingly close and friendly contact of races and nations with one another is in no small part the result of the progress of religion. What will be its reflex influence on the religions of the world? Will it bring peace or a sword? Which ought it to bring? In the general era of international peace, ought Christians to make as little effort to change the religious condition of other peoples as to overthrow their government or their civilization, or ought the increasing closeness of contact and intimacy of relations to stimulate missionary zeal?

The martial spirit in religion has already been greatly modified by more intimate acquaintance between Christian and non-Christian peoples. The missionary efforts of Christians have, especially within the last century, done much not only to bring the knowledge of the Christian religion to non-Christians, but also to acquaint Christians with the non-Christian religions and their adherents. Mutual acquaintance has generated mutual respect, and toleration and emulation have, in no small measure, taken the place of contempt and hostility. Men of different religions are in many instances more friendly today than a century ago were men of different sects of the same religion. We have come to see that it is un-Christian as well as unscientific to refuse to admit the truth of the true or the goodness of the good wherever it may be found.

But the attitude of Christian thinkers toward the adherents of other religions has also been modified by larger knowledge of their own religion. Historical and sociological studies have combined to force upon the minds of Christians the recognition of

defects of historic Christianity. These defects pertain not simply to the practices of professed Christians of today; they have never been absent, except in the life and teachings of Jesus himself. Neither the prophets that preceded him nor the apostles that followed him were perfect in life or infallible in doctrine. One of the greatest claims of Christianity to the respect of men has been its self-criticism accompanied by the power, often suppressed and held in check, but never lost, of reform and rejuvenation from within. The increasing recognition of this fact has tended not only to create among Christians a sympathetic attitude toward other religions, but also to lead the propagator of Christianity to turn upon his own religion, as he has inherited and held it, the scrutiny of honest criticism, and to endeavor to include in his message all those elements and only those elements of historic Christianity which are calculated to elevate the life of the people to whom he brings his message. These influences have undoubtedly already abated the zeal of Christian missionaries to overthrow and supplant other religions, and are already leading many of them to adopt, as the expression of their attitude toward non-Christian religions, the words of Jesus, "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil."

But this does not signify an abatement of genuine missionary zeal. In the long run, and even speedily, the increasing intimacy of international relationships will bring with it a reinforcement of the missionary spirit of Christianity. The force that created the modern missionary movement was the spirit of altruism that is at the very center of Christianity. The specific expression of this altruism was affected by the theological dogmas then current and the opinions then prevalent respecting non-Christian peoples and their religions. The modification of these dogmas and opinions will modify the expression of the missionary spirit, but will not destroy it. To the abiding desire, which can perish only when Christianity itself perishes, to do good to all men as we have opportunity, the new conditions of our day will bring a powerful reinforcement. The enlargement of our sphere of influence simply increases the number of those with whom we must seek, in the spirit of our Master, to share the best we have.

But more than this: the inevitableness of the contact between

Christian and non-Christian peoples, the fact that we cannot if we would escape influencing other nations, compels us to be missionaries, and furnishes a new motive for being bearers of the best. Merchants, diplomats, travelers for pleasure and curiosity, even the propagators of the vices of Christian lands, are constantly giving to other nations their account of the Christian religion, and exerting on them an influence which is, not wholly wrongly, charged to the account of Christian nations. But if this representation of our religion is inadequate and incorrect, if there are in that religion elements of truth and of power for the elevation of human life of which the merchant and the traveler give no just and adequate expression, then not the Christian spirit of benevolence only, but even justice, demands that we shall supplement this incorrect and insufficient expression of our religion by one which will not only represent it more justly, but which will make it a helpful rather than quite possibly a harmful influence on the lives of other peoples.

The zeal for the speedy accomplishment of a great task which has found expression in that watchword of more than one modern missionary movement, "the Evangelization of the World in this Generation," will probably give place, as it ought, to a recognition of the fact that the purposes of God ripen slowly, and that he who has never forgotten the nations of the East may not hasten to its completion the accomplishment of his great purpose for them in our day or through our hands. It may lead us to think more of the parable of the leaven, and less of that of the wheat and the tares. It may transfer our emphasis from the methods that promise speedy results to those that look to the distant future, and make us willing to sink our lives as Jesus gave his, in a movement which, after centuries, still awaits its fruition. But, in the long run, if we believe in the religion of Jesus and have his spirit in our hearts, the larger our world the more the channels of mutual influence that connect its several parts, the more zealous we shall be to see that our Christianity, freed to the utmost possible extent from all elements of weakness and impurity, shall exert its beneficent influence upon, and become a mighty power in, that federation of the nations which will presently include all the peoples of the world.